

Revisiting the Dormitory: The RPS Libraries of Indiana University *

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From the perspective of a typical undergraduate college student, life does not open itself to many extracurricular reading opportunities. When I was an undergraduate, juggling classwork, membership in campus organizations, friends, family, and a part-time job meant I did not always complete assigned readings, never mind enjoyable reading. In graduate school at Indiana University, I was exposed to what seemed like a fantastical idea—residence hall libraries to support leisure reading. Now, I am convinced that having a library full of classic and contemporary literature, films, music, and more in the dormitory, so close students do not have to change out of pajama pants and slippers to go, is an excellent way to associate reading with pleasure for undergraduate students and to create a campus culture of reading.

History of Dormitory Libraries

Little has been written on the topic; yet, it is known that history owes the concept and subsequent popularization of the residence hall library to the House Library Plan at Harvard University. Opening with seven residential libraries in 1928, the houses of Harvard created picturesque study spaces and academic collections under the supervision of a resident master.’’¹ The objective behind the house libraries was to integrate living and learning and to restore to undergraduate life some of the social values it had [once] offered ...’’² The house masters curated a collection of books to directly support academic coursework, which were checked in and out on the honor system.³ The overall goal can be seen in the description of the Lowell House Library, a scholarly gentleman’s library to appeal to literary tastes and to encourage potential

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bibliophiles.’’⁴ Gradually, individual house libraries developed subject specialties. For example, some would cater more to students of the humanities, while others focused in the sciences.⁵

Following the Harvard House Plan, many institutions experimented with the model of residence hall libraries. At the peak of the trend (roughly 1940–1960), there were more than 20 residence hall library systems across North America. Among them were operations at Harvard University, Stephens College, Yale University, Dartmouth University, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Princeton University, University of Alberta, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Kansas, University of Michigan, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Indiana University.⁶

Residence hall libraries were difficult for institutions to operate for various reasons, including management, funding, and security.^{7, 8, 9} Edward Stanford found that oversight by the university library system was essential to the success of a residence hall library; however, many systems still struggled with the question of which unit should manage the residence libraries.¹⁰ Along with the problem of management was the problem of sustainable funding. The creation of a new library system required institutions to invest a considerable amount of money without a clear indication of the outcome.¹¹ Finally, with Harvard’s model for circulation control operating on the honor system amid limited staffing, many subsequent residence hall libraries failed because of theft. One librarian decried,

Without regular staffing these [collections] were all looted and scattered indiscriminately. ... unless these [residence hall libraries] are set up as staffed and controlled collections. ... it is not worth investing money in them .. .’’¹²

By 1978, the number of active residence hall libraries funded and serving students had shrunk to 12.¹³ In 2014, that number has further shriveled to two: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Indiana University. While residence halls at Stanford and Yale still offer libraries in their lists of amenities, these facilities are not staffed, nor are their collections listed in the university catalog. Additionally, the University of Michigan maintained residence hall libraries until the 2003–2004 academic year, at which time they started converting some libraries into community learning centers and deaccessioned or sold the contents of the others.¹⁴

Opening in 1969, the residence hall libraries at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have had a successful history due to a full-time staff and institutional support. This program moved beyond the limits of the initial Harvard model and adapted to serve users with the best methods possible. Nevertheless, this chapter will focus on the older and larger residence hall library system at Indiana University in Bloomington. As a graduate student in the IU School of Library and Information Science, I worked in this system of residence hall libraries. During my tenure, I worked at each location, starting as a student assistant, then a center supervisor, and eventually the assistant manager of libraries.

Halls of Residence Libraries at Indiana University

The Indiana University residence hall libraries have a long and complicated history, which is best chronicled by Barbara Brand Fischler¹⁵ and David A. Flynn.¹⁶ Susan Andriette Ariew¹⁷ and Gail Oltmanns and John H. Schuh¹⁸ also track the system's journey and impact. When the first residence hall library opened what was then Men's Residence Living Center (now the Collins Living-Learning Center) in February 1941, the residence hall libraries were a kind of souvenir brought back by the eleventh president of Indiana University, Herman B Wells, and the director of the halls of residence, Alice Nelson, from individual trips to the dormitory libraries at

Harvard and Yale.¹⁹ Wells is noted as saying, "... if something was good enough for Yale or Harvard or Princeton, it might be good enough for us."²⁰ The impetus of the Halls of Residence Libraries, as it would soon be called, was the thought that there is a positive educational advantage to leisure-time reading in student housing, and this would be beneficial to student learning and success.²¹ More than 70 years later, this foundational idea still supports the IU system of residence hall libraries.

Funding the Halls of Residence Libraries initiated substantial cultural change at the university. On October 1, 1940, the Halls of Residence Committee voted to allow vending machines in the dormitories for the first time and to use a portion of the revenue to purchase books for the new libraries.²² By January 1, 1941, purchases from the new candy, peanut, cigarette, and Coca-Cola machines reached \$505.05, enabling the new libraries to get off of the ground.²³ Collection development for the libraries was led by two committees of faculty members and students who represented the residence hall population. Each residence hall created a list of suggested items, and the student representatives presented the lists to the committees for approval.²⁴ The first list of titles included *Birds of America*, *Encyclopedia of Art*, *Physics Made Easy*, *Book of Oriental Literature*, *Nine Plays*, *Origin of Species*, and *War and Peace*.²⁵ Though the consensus was that the Halls of Residence Libraries should not be reference rooms for university courses, the committees were concerned with stocking shelves with good'' leisure-time reading ... to develop the student's desire to know good books.'²⁶

As the Halls of Residence Libraries expanded both in number and collections, the concept of good'' materials would clash with students' desires for recreational reading. When in 1945 IU band director Gerald H. Doty was chosen to lead a committee to develop a music collection that would provide permanent value'' to the residence hall libraries, he concluded this

would eliminate all popular purchases from [the] fund.’’²⁷ This struggle between good’’ or high-caliber items and popular items continued as the collection expanded into film. The Halls of Residence Committee chose only films of an educational nature and not for recreational type of entertainment.’’²⁸

The management of the Halls of Residence Libraries has been the responsibility of many units over the years. Starting with the Residence Halls Committee with a brief period of collaboration with the University Libraries, the system was also managed by the Graduate School and the dean of students. Mismanagement seriously bungled the system’s collection development and infrastructure. Similar to other dormitory library systems, many items were lost and stolen from the libraries at IU.

In 1959, the dean of undergraduate development, Samuel Braden, hired the first full-time HRL librarian, Barbara Pratt.²⁹ During her tenure, the legendary Pratt whipped the system into shape. She started a tradition of hiring graduate Library and Information Science (LIS) students to manage each individual library. In addition, she opened new libraries and instituted a new collection development plan—one that valued student interest a bit more than prestige. Doris Koch, Pratt’s long-time assistant, recalls, [We] saw a basic Rock n Roll collection listed in one of the library journals and we bought the whole thing for each library. . . . We sort of agonized over whether to buy eight-tracks or cassettes. . . . we chose the cassettes.’’³⁰ This is a far cry from the planned music collection of 1945.

Decreasing vending machine revenue accompanied by the allowance of low-watt mini-fridges in dorm rooms signaled a necessary change to the Halls of Residence Libraries. Following much discussion, the system’s management moved into the control of the University Libraries in 1974, and funding was provided from a three-dollar activity fee added to tuition

costs.³¹ In the hands of the University Libraries and under the direction of Carolyn Tynan Walters, the system opened a family housing library and added the collection of 30,000 materials to the online university catalog.³²

Move from IU Libraries to RPS and Current Structure

In 2001, Halls of Residence Libraries was moved under the control of IU Residential Programs and Services (RPS).³³ However, the new RPS Libraries maintained collaboration with the University Libraries through sustained connection of the latter's circulation and cataloging infrastructure. At this time, six previous library spaces were converted into Music, Movies, and More (3M) centers to complement the other six, more successful, residential libraries. When former libraries were renovated into 3M centers, their monograph collections were added to the remaining libraries' collections, and RPS leaders made sure that a full library was located in every residence neighborhood on campus; therefore, residential students would always be within walking distance of an RPS library. Administratively, the system sits under the control of the director of residential life, and Manager of Academic Services Shawn Wilson, who holds a master of library science degree, is the manager of libraries.

In addition to Wilson, the RPS Libraries central office employs Library Services Coordinator Tina Walsh, an assistant manager of libraries, a part-time cataloger, and two student technical assistants. Each of the 12 libraries and 3M centers has a center supervisor, usually a graduate student in library science, and a staff of five to seven student assistants. Locations are open 5:00 p.m. until midnight, seven nights a week during the regular academic year. The system is closed during school breaks, and only the Campus View (Family Housing) Library operates during the summer.

In the 2012–2013 academic year, 111,450 users visited the libraries. This number is usually higher; however, one 3M was closed during the year for renovations. As of February 2014, the Indiana University online catalog, IUCAT, showed RPS Libraries holdings of 49,700 items. The system circulates books (reference, fiction, and nonfiction), music (CDs), films (DVDs & Blu-ray), and various video games, and all libraries offer a non-circulating collection of popular newspapers and magazines. Student identification cards serve as library cards, and fines are connected to a student's bursar account balance. With a staff of about 90 and 49 weekly open hours, the RPS Libraries system is similar to a small public library system.

Popular Collections

Beginning in 1949 with the construction of the Joseph A. Wright Quadrangle, every new residence hall on the IU Bloomington campus had space for a library.³⁴ In many dorms, Willkie Residence Center, for example, the library space is a beautiful and prominent feature of the architecture. Currently, every library has shelving adequate to hold roughly 6,000 materials (books, DVDs, CDs, newspapers, and magazines), study tables and chairs, soft seating, and a circulation desk. The 3M centers are smaller spaces that are not designed for study. The libraries and 3M centers are near enough to residence hall computer labs that most do not have computers available for users.

The residence hall libraries of Indiana University, Bloomington were established as a source of good leisure reading and reference materials.’’³⁵ During its history, good leisure reading’’ has had many meanings. In 1941, it seemed to mean of lasting educational value.’’ Seventy-three years later, more worth is placed on the value of pleasurable, popular, and/or culturally significant materials. Indeed, the times have changed, and films need not be purely educational—both entertainment and cultural impact are considered important.

After a study of students' use and perceptions of the residence hall libraries, IU librarian Gail Oltmanns and Associate Dean of Students John H. Schuh found data to suggest collections of this type should be developed more to meet the recreational reading needs of students.³⁶ Oltmanns and Schuh conclude successful residence hall libraries should meet the general public library needs of students who live in residence, and that academic needs can be met by. ... the campus library system.''³⁷ The current mission of RPS Libraries is to provide residents with library collections, programs, and services that support their academic, cultural, and recreational needs.''³⁸ It is perhaps the support of recreational needs that is most responsible for the continued success of the system.

The direction of the collection development in the RPS Libraries has tilted into the direction of popular materials since at least the Pratt era. This is reasonable since the system is motivated by use: from 1974 to present, residential student activity fees have funded the system, and low door counts would signal its obsolescence. By filling a gap in the collections of the main university library system and being more convenient than the local public library to residential students, the RPS Libraries niche of popular items ensures its success. Many a graduate student and faculty member has been saddened to learn that all of the university's copies of, say, *Mean Girls* are owned by RPS Libraries and are available only to residents of the residence halls, though the system will allow a professor to check out materials for class under special permission. Even at a time when Redbox, Netflix, iTunes, Kindles, and illegal downloading are ubiquitous, the RPS libraries are as busy as ever.

This is not to say the collections of the RPS Libraries are trivial in nature. The holdings of the system include reference books, classic literature, award-winning films, and music. In the very early years, it would have been unlikely for contemporary literature to be purchased;

however, current collection development relies on sources like the New York Times, Amazon, and iTunes for their bestseller's lists. Residence hall libraries previously contained reserves for courses, but this service is no longer provided. It likely ended after Oltmanns and Schuh's study on the use of the libraries. The system relieved itself of most services that competed against the university libraries' expertise, though it should not be said that the RPS Libraries directly competes with the local public library, and the Monroe County Public Library remains a very successful library system. Further, staff encourage users to patronize the public library if they cannot find desired items within the RPS Libraries holdings. In this way, the system helps inspire students to use the public library and to build a habit of library use for life.

As previously mentioned, monographic purchase decisions take into account resources such as the New York Times and Amazon's bestseller lists. The libraries aim to offer books that are popular in contemporary culture, in addition to literary classics and genre fiction. In this way, the collections are similar to browsing collections,' which are becoming a trend in traditional academic libraries.³⁹ Broadening into public library territory, staff members of the RPS Libraries provide readers' and/or viewers' advisory services. Moreover, locations most often feature a staff picks'' display with book, movie, or album reviews written by student assistants and center supervisors.

Embedded Librarianship

Though there is a considerable amount of overlap, each library's collection maintains a personality of its own, largely based on each dormitory's student population. For example, the Campus View (Family Housing) Library serves more international students than average and as a result, its collection has a significant number of international and foreign language items. Additionally, as it serves families, the Campus View Library is the only RPS library with

children's books. The Collins Library is known for its collection of graphic novels and zines, as the students of the Collins Living-Learning Center are known for their creative and artistic talents.

Moreover, in most cases, a residence hall's student government makes special donations to the library or 3M to expand its collection to include materials of educational or cultural significance to students in residence. In 2009, the students of Eigenmann Residence Center gave such a donation to start a collection of books on the topic of sustainability. The center supervisor not only purchased materials in the area but also collaborated with student organizations to develop programs on the topic of environmental sustainability in the library.

Collaboration with the residence hall is important to the staff of the RPS Libraries. The move in management from the University Libraries to Residential Programs and Services seems to have added powerful motivation to work with residence hall staff and student organizations. Center supervisors sit on the community boards of the residence centers and often collaborate with center constituents to provide relevant, cohesive programming. The library system is completely embedded in the residence hall, and it is successful as a result of the full support of the residential life unit.

In addition, each month, center supervisors are required to develop an out-reach program. RPS Libraries management encourages partnerships with campus or residence hall organizations. Monthly programs usually highlight a part of the location's collection, and they have educational, cultural, and/or recreational learning outcomes. Some past programs include Banned Books, Hispanic History, and Love & Murder (Valentine's Day). A successful program RPS libraries have offered is one in which a user reads a certain number of books from the collection or possibly even from a specific genre. After completing the readings, the user receives a candy

bar. This kind of programming helps build a more robust culture of reading on campus and creates a community of readers within the residence hall. Further, possibly nostalgic of primary school, users of the RPS Libraries respond well to programs with a crafting component, and accordingly, many programs feature craft projects like creating hand turkeys, coloring, and origami. Most RPS Libraries staff believe the crafting programs are playful pastimes to help students relax from coursework.

The Potential of Residence Hall Libraries

Recent literature on libraries and residence halls highlights successful instances of academic library outreach in residence centers, with notable programs at Purdue University and the University of Oklahoma.^{40, 41, 42} Moreover, some chapters of this book detail the development and triumph of small community lending libraries in residence halls. These initiatives are significant and should be esteemed; however, it is my belief that these are only small steps toward a far away goal. If the literature is true, and academic librarians want students, particularly undergraduate students, to engage in more pleasure reading, then academic libraries need to reconsider the residence hall library in the model of Indiana University or the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The trend of popular browsing collections at academic libraries is surging. Academic librarians are asserting the importance of leisure reading collections, which include popular titles students would want to read for pleasure.⁴³ This trend is partially steeped in the belief that students will be attracted to the popular items and will perhaps also peruse more of the library's collection.⁴⁴ However, a major obstacle to this movement is the cadre of academic librarians who fear popular browsing areas will somehow make academic libraries appear less academic and more like a public library.⁴⁵ Creating a residence hall branch library and relocating a potential

popular browsing collection to that space could be a solution to assuage concerns and increase student engagement with the main campus library.

Students are more likely to engage in pleasure reading when engaged in an academic setting.⁴⁶ For recreation, they are more likely to use visual media than books.⁴⁷ The RPS library model for collections, which feature books, movies, music, and more, capitalizes not only on the media preferences of undergraduate students it also creates an environment conducive to pleasure reading. A common display at an RPS library will center on a popular movie or television series. The message will advertise, Do you like the Twilight films? You might also enjoy the Twilight series of books. Or Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Or Bram Stoker's Dracula. Or books by Anne Rice. Or the latest album by Vampire Weekend.' All of the suggested items would be on display and available, and based on my experience, most of the items would be circulated. This kind of readers' and viewers' advisory is uncomfortable for many academic librarians,⁴⁸ but it does feel natural in a residence hall library.

If an institution were to create a new residence hall library, it would be important to collaborate with the director of residence life. The university library and the office of student affairs could negotiate a funding structure. The idea could be proposed as a joint initiative to increase retention and academic success. The expertise in the academic library's circulation and security infrastructure would be essential to protect the investment in the collection. As a potential branch of the main library system, such a library could feature some small reference services and guides. In addition to print books, a residence hall library would do well to include popular eBooks.

Furthermore, it seems imperative for residence hall libraries to be open late night and weekend hours. The most active time for an RPS library is Friday night, when more than 100

students enter the doors in search of a productive way to relax. Both IU and UIUC have success employing trained student workers to staff the libraries during open hours.

Though a residence hall library is not the answer for every institution, it would likely work on many campuses. The 86-year-old idea to encourage potential bibliophiles⁴⁹ is still a good one, though its initial conception was flawed. The flaws included poor security, mismanagement, and spotty, uninteresting collections. The final flaw was a tragic result of the residence hall library attempting to compete with the main academic library. Competition for dominance in academic collections, course reserves, and reference will never and has never been the appropriate fight for the residence hall library. On the other hand, the residence hall library can extraordinarily provide a niche collection in popular titles to support or augment a student's academic, cultural, and recreational needs. Instead of competing with the public library, it brings the public library to a demographic that traditionally does not use it or read for pleasure.

Notes

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